

## Applying IO in the Real World

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We are all IO professionals, passionate about what we do, and our ability to make a positive difference in the battle space. Otherwise, why would you be reading this?

Do any of these scenarios seem familiar? You've read the operations order and listened to the General Officer expound on the critical nature of winning the "information battle." You measure this against available resources: two junior officers fresh from the IO course; a Chief of Staff who can neither spell 'IO' nor see the need for a weapons system that doesn't go bang; and 38 PSYOP professionals in a force of 11,000.

Do I exaggerate? Only slightly, for I've been in precisely these situations in Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan. In situations such as these, personality plays a critical role—one that it should not. Why is this? No officer that makes it past platoon commander would question the necessity and contribution that *all* elements of the team play in mission success. They may make fun of their counterparts in the other services, but they understand the part they play. Moreover, they also understand that though they have a view on the utility and employment of the other teams' assets, they bow to the superior knowledge of specialists. They also take exception to having their professional knowledge questioned by anyone outside their specialty. So why doesn't this attitude extend to IO and IO professionals?

Where does personality come into this? Firstly it is highly unlikely the commander will be either an IO professional or have come from any of the core or supporting capabilities. Almost certainly he will be a "J3 snob," schooled in the certainties of combat power, with instant success or failure confirmed by BDA. If you are lucky, he will have seen IO work in previous operations and therefore be predisposed to embrace it. That said, even in the early part of the 21st century this is less likely than having a commander with no IO knowledge or experience. If so, he will have to be a strong and open commander, willing to embrace "new" ideas and the patience to wait for the results. Should this not be the case, then the second personality comes into play: the collective personality of the IO team. They must be capable, professional and strong so that they can win the first battle in the IO war: convincing the commander and his staff that IO is critical to mission success.

In Bosnia we faced exactly this issue. The PSYOP team produced a weekly paper called *Mostovi* which ran up against a weekly print deadline. Not because we were inefficient, but because we had to chase it through the approval process every time. No one in the process believed it was an important part of the campaign, therefore it was never a priority. The prevailing attitude was that it was a lot of effort to make 'fire starters' for the locals. We needed to prove that people read it, that it was a local means of communicating. So we decided to run a readers survey on the back page of one issue. The survey asked a few questions about national issues, plus readers' opinions of the paper, and what we could do to make it better. To spice the

pot we offered a prize for the most constructive comments: a credit card FM radio then used as a promotional tool by a British bank. When we explained what we were going to do, the idea was met with howls of derision, with the general opinion that it would be a waste of time—particularly as respondents needed to give an address in case they won the prize. At the time the circulation was 35,000, and a generally accepted rule of thumb in the UK was that about 5% of readers regularly responded to such surveys. We received 15,000 replies. Approval issues disappeared, people were only too happy to be interviewed, and rather than paying the printing contract from the HQ stationary budget, we received properly approved funds.

Sometimes two strong personalities come together, and when they do, you don't have to battle the staff. Such was the case in Afghanistan where the regional commander "got it." He encouraged the IO team and challenged them to make a difference. On many occasions he noted we were not just there to kill the Taliban—we would do that as required—but ultimately the solution lay with convincing the locals to support the Government of Afghanistan and reject the Taliban. Did the commander feel this way before arriving in Afghanistan? I do not know, but his IO chief was a strong, capable and intelligent individual, accepted into the inner command circle, and therefore had his ear. All of these were significant contributing factors. The opposite was the case during my tour in Iraq, where the IO chief was not accepted into the 'inner circle.' Consequently, even when he had good ideas no one listened, and his very capable team was sidelined.

Should the success of the IO campaign rely on this cult of personality? Of course not. So how do we overcome this problem? I believe we must tackle three areas, and they lie in our own hands to influence. We must ensure that all we do is properly planned—by this I mean we must not pay lip service to MOE. It is a difficult issue to deal with, but if we do not fully consider how to benchmark attitudes then measure any changes, we are destined to fail. If we cannot measure the effect we are trying to achieve we are wasting our time, and should look at other options. Secondly, we must improve IO training, not of the practitioners, but of those who command and control the capability. They must know what IO is and what it is not. We can manage commanders' expectations so they will understand that the "long war" will continue long after they hand over, thus becoming unwilling to accept last minute augmentees and ask "where is my IO staff." Finally, as IO professionals we must live up to that title and push against closed doors. We must never accept IO being paid lip service in planning, exercises and certainly not in operations.